

The Divine Humanity of Christ.



A SERMON .

PREACHED AT BRUNSWICK, MAINE, AT THE

INSTALLATION OF REV. CHARLES A. ALLEN,
AS PASTOR OF THE UNITARIAN CHURCH,
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BY

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S E R M O N.

“HE THAT HATH SEEN ME HATH SEEN THE FATHER.” — *John* xiv. 9.

THE Father, — not the second person of a tripartite or a triune God, but the Father, whom the popular theology has so separated from the Son, that by no possibility could either represent the other. God, as a Father, could be manifested on earth and among men. His omnipotence and omniscience can be shared by no finite being. There can be but one Almighty, but one All-Wise in the universe. But fatherhood, — that is, perfect love and tenderness, the perpetual outgoing of kind thought, watchful care and offices of mercy, the yearning affection which can never count the lost as wholly lost, and which bestows only the more abundant effort and sacrifice where there is the deepest need, — this may be incarnate on earth, may dwell among men, and they may behold its ineffable beauty and glory. It has dwelt, in all its fulness, its divineness, its unsurpassable perfectness, once, and but once, in a human form. Its path on earth was thick-sown with benefits for man. It won the clinging embrace of innocent childhood. It spurned not the touch of the loathsome leper. It whelmed with unhopd forgiveness the despised and rejected of their brethren. It sent the maniac from his lair among the tombs to gladden his household. The dead heard its voice and lived, and the cry went forth, — “God hath visited and redeemed his people.” On the cross, it breathed only intercession and

blessing. In death, it was too strong to die ; and it slept in the grave only that there might grow from it the perennial spring-flowers of the hope full of immortality.

The dogma of the Trinity and that of the two natures in Christ are not so much errors, as imperfectly developed truths. They are faulty in asserting, not too much, but too little. They recognize the divine and the human in Christ, but fail to interpret their synthesis, — to show how they make, not two natures, but one nature, — human because divine, divine because human. Christ is pre-eminently human, because in him, alone among men, has been borne the Divine image without stain of sin or shadow of imperfection. He is pre-eminently divine, because he manifests in its entirety the ideal of humanity, — what every true man feels within himself the capacity of becoming, of growing into, — not, it may be, fully in this world ; not fully, it may be, in the unseen future ; but with ever-increasing fulness, as he shall pass on from strength to strength, and from glory to glory. For while Jesus is by a unique title the Son of God, it is only in the same sense in which we all may be sons of God, and in which he, the best-beloved because the most godlike, is not ashamed to call us his brethren.

Let us develop this view. What is humanity? In our very use of the word, we answer the question. In our common language, we apply the term only to what is divine in man, and whatever is utterly ungodlike we call inhuman. Men have, indeed, in their apostasy and debasement, glorified inhumanity. Many of the (so-called) great have acquired that title by carnage, usurpation, craft, meanness, by superior powers energized by pernicious passions, by deeds that have had an exclusively selfward aim and end. But not one of them has ever seemed, even to his flatterers, to approach the ideal man. They have been admired, but not revered. None would desire to see their type mul-

tiplied. None would approve, though nations might applaud.

But the ideal man — the ideal even of those who are the farthest possible from realizing it — is made up of attributes purely and distinctively godlike. He loves his kind, and seeks their good. He has no selfward aims; nor yet has he a beneficence confined within the narrow limits of clan, sect, party, nation, or race. His mission is to create happiness and well-being wherever he can. He is an agent of the Infinite Providence throughout his own finite sphere. He has no malignant passions: no hatred, envy, or ill-will; no personal resentment; no indignation, except that righteous indignation which abhors and detests moral evil because it is the undoing and ruin of man, and which therefore rescues the victims of evil the more earnestly the viler it has made them. This love, too, is a pure spirit; for it burns up and neutralizes every corrupting miasma. It is divine; for it flows from God, mounting first to him, purging itself from earthly dross in the consuming fire of his love, thence reflux manward. It is his spirit in man; for "he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Now you can probably find no man of developed mind, whatever his character, who will not confess this to be the highest type of humanity; none whose best affections are not stirred by the contemplation of it. It is men of this type only that have an enduring, unquestioned, unsullied fame. All others have their detractors, and all other fame grows dim in the distance. How many of the greatest names are mere names in history: recalled without emotion, without interest; remembered only because they were associated with great events, — wars, dynasties, marked epochs in scientific development, new schools of thought, crises in man's intellectual progress! No affections cling about them; no heart beats with a quicker pulse at their

mention; even the good that they have incidentally done has no hold on the gratitude of posterity.

Meanwhile, names come down to us from remotest antiquity: they thicken as the ages roll on; they are constellations of intense brightness as they cluster around the Saviour and in the age of primitive purity succeeding his resurrection; they shine now thinner, now more dense, all along the pages of Christian history; they glow with pure radiance among the dead and the living of our own time, — names which we cannot recall without emotion, of men who have manifested and wrought righteousness; who have loved mercy; who have wrestled with abounding wrong, sin, and evil; who have been God's angels to the poor, the prisoner, the slave; who have given themselves living, often dying, sacrifices for those for whom Jesus lived and died. Of these he is the prototype, — "the first-born among many brethren." And these are the true men, the only true men; less than he, only so far as theirs has been less than perfect humanity; he greater than they, only because in him alone has humanity been perfect. They have been most veritably human, only because godlike; he pre-eminently human, because superlatively godlike.

But if the human is divine, no less is the divine, so far as we can know it, human. True, God has, as I have said, incommunicable attributes; but they are also incomprehensible. His omnipresence, while we cannot doubt it, is beyond our conception. His creative energy, his all-embracing providence, alone can render this orderly universe possible; but these are mysteries which we are unable equally to deny and to understand. Nor is it for any or all of these that we adore, praise, and love him. If we can imagine a Being infinite in power and in knowledge, everywhere present, yet a mere creating, co-ordinating, and controlling Deity, with no attribute which we

could share, — or with those attributes which belong to our humanity, not in its typical purity, but in its debasement and unworthiness, — no thought of worship, gratitude, or affection would ever rise to his throne. At most, his being would be the subject of cold speculation; more probably, of cold indifference. It is for what we may without irreverence term God's humanity (for are not we his offspring?) that he has the homage of our hearts. "We love him, because he first loved us." We render back to him the very affections which we have derived from him, — which have flowed into our hearts from his own fulness. The very name by which we are wont to pray to him is the purest of all names of human love, designating relations in one or both of which we all have stood, and redolent of the whole sisterhood of home-affections, and of those diffusive loves of which the home worthy to be so called is the laboratory. We equally adore his justice. But what justice? Not that flinty, inexorable attribute which so often bears the name, and makes it hateful among men; but the justice which is the last perfection of love, — love universal, because it is due to all; discriminating, because needs and receptivities vary; impartial, because so full for all that it cannot be fuller for any: in fine, the justice of a father, whose aim is the highest good of each and every child of his, yet whose discipline takes its tone from the character and proclivities of each, and whose love is no less intense in rebuke or punishment, in task or stint, than in approval or reward, gift or indulgence. We adore also his purity, his holiness; but this is a human attribute, and ought to appertain to human fatherhood no less than to the divine, — nay, it is unspeakably strange and pitiable that the mere fact of fatherhood or motherhood should not awaken a yearning for it; for what soul that seeks not to be pure and holy is worthy to be entrusted with the nurture of the clean, white soul of a child?

In fine, the God whom we worship, thank, and love, is God the Father; and while we cannot ascribe omnipotence and omniscience to Jesus, especially when he repeatedly disclaims them, we do see in him, the Father; we behold in him, and in their perfectness, the very elements, and all the elements, that enter into the Divine Fatherhood. In this sense, though a created, finite, human being, he is the manifest God, the Emmanuel, the God with us. So much, and only so much, of the divine nature as we behold in him we fully understand and thoroughly know. In rejecting him we repudiate the Father, and fall back upon the vast, formless, vague conception of the Creator and Ruler, most probably lapsing thence into the pantheistic phantasm of a formative principle in Nature, — a soul of the universe lacking all the attributes of a living soul, even self-consciousness. For it is worthy of our emphatic notice that in theism without Christianity we almost always miss all the distinguishing attributes which make God the object of love or trust or prayer; and, when any of these attributes still remain in the faith of the non-Christian theist, they may unfailingly be recognized as the lingering vestiges of a Christian education.

We are, then, to look for the divine in Christ to his humanity. Is it not in this that we find what in him awakens our love, our gratitude, our reverence? Even in what we call his mighty works, it is not his might, but his compassion, his sympathy, his mercy, that wins our homage. How does his heart go forth in these ministries to the suffering and the sorrowing! The narrative of raising the widow's son at the gates of Nain would be shorn of its charm, were it not for the tenderness of his fellow-feeling with the mother's grief. The story of Lazarus is hallowed for our faith by the tears of Jesus, by his self-identification with the bereaved family, by his walking with them to the tomb as himself a mourner with them.

And what is that lifting up of the Son of Man which is to draw all men unto him? Not his ascent to some proud pinnacle of fame or glory; but his elevation on the cross, where he was most divine because it was the climax of his all-embracing human love, — the apotheosis of humanity.

None can attach more importance than I do to the entire, and, as I believe, authentic history of his life. But it is not the marvellous in his story that is truly divine. All this might have been; yet had he not loved as none else ever loved, it would not have won a single heart to his service. It was, indeed, fitting that there should have been in his exterior history traits which should single him out from among men; which should fix the eyes of the world and of successive generations upon him as unique among the sons of God and man; which should set upon his mission the unmistakable token of pre-eminence, fulfilling his words, "Him hath God the Father sealed." But it is in his divine humanity, in his human divinity, that resides his subduing, intenerating, hallowing power upon the hearts of his followers. It is for his love and mercy; his sacrifice, cross, agony, and death, that he has the name above every name.

But what is his mission to man? It is that in us there may be wrought that same synthesis of the human and the divine which we behold in him, — that, in the apostle's words, we may be "followers of God as dear children;" that we may become "partakers of the divine nature;" that we may be the spiritual progeny of him, the second Adam, the ancestor of a race of true men, as the first Adam was the ancestor of a race that had betrayed, debased, often absolutely imbruted its humanity.

We are, then, to look to him as the type, not of a superior order of beings, but of humanity, as it is in its native capacity, in its possibilities, its destiny. His prayer

for his disciples, and for those who to the end of time shall believe in him through their word, is, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."

Here let us mark the words which he adds to this petition, "That the world may believe that thou hast sent me." The world does not so believe. There is around us a great deal of avowed scepticism, still more of an indifference which is but latent scepticism. There are, too, large numbers of men and women that call themselves Christians. Suppose that among these the work of Christ were really wrought, so that all or most of them bore, though imperfectly, yet distinctly and with growing distinctness, the impress of his divine humanity; suppose that, not in profession, but in purity, holiness, and love they were every day saying, "To me to live is Christ;" suppose that a Christ formed within were all the time outraying itself in their justice, kindness, meekness, gentleness, loyalty to duty, faithful service to the world around them, — where, think you, would be the sceptics? Oh! it is for such a manifestation of the sons of God that the whole spiritual creation groans and travails. Every Christian should be a living argument for the Gospel; and, I apprehend, this is the only argument endowed with convincing and reclaiming power. I cannot doubt that the gospel will live and Christ will reign: but it will live only in the lives that it sanctifies; he will reign only in the souls that he renews in his own image. I, therefore, cannot but believe that it is by the revival of his divine humanity as the soul of the Church which is his body, that the faith of men is to be won, and unbelief and doubt dissipated. The word then comes to each of us believers in Christ, — Be ye followers of him in whom ye believe, close and ever closer followers. There is nothing in his spirit that may not be in yours. There is no divine beauty,

grace, loveliness in him that is not human, and that may not make your humanity divine.

I have thus sought to present Christ as in his divine humanity our exemplar, our type, our cynosure. He stands alone, indeed, but on the summit which it is ours to climb, and stand there with him. He overcame in the very conflicts in which it is God's will that we too should be more than conquerors. He has taken his place at the right hand of the Father, where there are room and welcome for all who would fain be with him. His promise is: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

My friends of this Christian church and society, my subject is of prime importance to you in connection with the career on which you have entered, and the ministry which you now establish. You naturally crave external prosperity. You want to see these seats filled with regular worshippers; you no doubt anticipate the day when your house of prayer will not suffice for those who will resort to it. You, also, desire to hold an equal and honored place among the religious societies of your town and neighborhood. But direct efforts to reach these ends will only make them more remote; while they can be attained only by that spiritual self-culture which has no ulterior aim beyond a growing kindred to Jesus in all that in him was truly human, and no less truly divine. Sectarian zeal will separate you from your fellow-Christians, and will alienate them from you. Zeal in following Christ will bring you into communion with them, and will make those who are seeking a religious home feel that it is well to be with you.

I cannot but believe that the time of denominational animosity has gone by, and that filaments of union are

multiplying and intertwining themselves among those who once seemed to have as little in common as the worshippers on Zion and on Gerizim. While by antagonism and controversy you retard this union, you cannot hasten it by explaining away your own opinions, by adopting from other Christian bodies phraseology which you cannot sincerely use, or by complaints when fellowship is withheld or delayed. On what you are individually in relation to your Lord and Master, must depend the growth and the fair Christian standing of your society. Ships bound for different ports may keep in sight of one another for a few days in calm weather; but must for the most part forego the comfort and benefit of mutual convoy. But ships bound for the same port, as they approach it, meet in squadrons, broaden into fleets, till, as they draw near the harbor, prow breasts prow, greetings ring from deck to deck, the confluent press of canvas whitens the narrowing sea, and the wake of each vessel, as it grows beneath the keel, is a convergent line with the wake of every other. Thus are the several sects of Christians, in proportion as they draw nearer to Christ, the soul's harbor, to become one, while yet not ceasing to be many.

If you are merely Unitarians, without being Christians, you will remain apart, and will find little sympathy outside of your own narrow circle. Yet more: that circle will be not a circle, but a diminishing spiral. You will lose those of your own number who begin to think seriously of duty, Christ, and heaven; and who, even without changing their speculative opinions, will find surer edification, richer spiritual pasturage in other folds. But if you show yourselves Christian men and women in your daily lives; if it may be said to each of you that is the head of a family, as to that disciple of old, "The church in thy house;" if those of you who are in business reverse the sacrilege of the Jewish traders, and make the house of

merchandise your Father's house; if you are frank and upright, kind and generous; if you show in your habitual walk and conversation that you have indeed been with Jesus, — you will find the work of your hands and the desire of your hearts crowned with abundant prosperity. Many will come and say: "We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you." With the pastor of your choice, be it your earnest, prayerful endeavor to build up, each for himself, for herself, the temple within in the beauty of a Christlike holiness. Thus resting, every member of it, on the one only foundation, "all the building, fitly framed together, shall grow unto an holy temple in the Lord."

ORDER OF SERVICES

AT THE

Installation of Rev. Charles A. Allen,

AS MINISTER OF THE UNITARIAN CHURCH IN
BRUNSWICK, MAINE, APRIL 25, 1879.

I.

ANTHEM.

II.

PRAYER.

BY REV. CHARLES A. CURTIS, OF AUGUSTA.

III.

SCRIPTURE LESSON.

BY REV. WILLIAM T. STOWE, OF ROCKLAND.

IV.

HYMN.

O'ER the dark wave of Galilee
The gloom of twilight gathers fast,
And on the waters drearily
Descends the fitful evening blast.

Still near the lake with weary tread
Lingers a form of human kind;
And on his lone unsheltered head
Flows the chill night damp of the wind.

Why seeks he not a home of rest ?
Why seeks he not a pillowed bed ?
Beasts have their dens, the bird its nest,
He hath not where to lay his head.

Such was the lot he freely chose,
To bless, to save the human race ;
And through his poverty there flows
A rich full stream of heavenly grace.

V.

SERMON.

BY REV. ANDREW P. PEABODY, D.D., PREACHER TO THE
UNIVERSITY AT CAMBRIDGE.

VI.

H Y M N.

THOU Lord of Hosts whose guiding hand
Has brought us here before Thy face !
Our spirits wait for Thy command,
Our silent hearts implore Thy peace.

Those spirits lay their noblest powers,
As offerings on Thy holy shrine ;
Thine was the strength that nourished ours ;
The soldiers of the cross are Thine.

Send us where'er Thou wilt, O Lord,
Through rugged toil and wearying fight ;
Thy conquering love shall be our sword,
And faith in Thee our truest might.

Send down Thy constant aid we pray ;
Be Thy pure angels with us still ;
Thy truth, be that our firmest stay,
Our only rest, to do Thy will.

VII.

PRAYER OF INSTALLATION.

BY REV. THOMAS HILL, D.D., OF PORTLAND.

VIII.

CHARGE.

BY REV. J. T. G. NICHOLS, D.D., OF SACO.

IX.

RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP.

BY REV. CHARLES C. VINAL, OF KENNEBUNK.

X.

ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE.

BY REV. RUSH R. SHIPPEN, OF BOSTON.

XI.

HYMN.

O SPIRIT of the living God !
In all Thy plenitude of grace,
Where'er the foot of man hath trod,
Descend on our benighted race.

Be darkness, at Thy coming, light,
Confusion, order in Thy path ;
Souls without strength inspire with might ;
Bid mercy triumph over wrath.

O Spirit of the Lord ! prepare
All the round earth her God to meet ;
Breathe Thou abroad like morning air,
Till hearts of stone begin to beat.

Baptize the nations ; far and nigh
The triumphs of the cross record ;
The name of Jesus glorify,
Till every kindred call him Lord.

XII.

BENEDICTION.